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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1103
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 8193
RUCNDDA/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0065
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C O N F I D E N T I A L JEDDAH 000013

SIPDIS

RIYADH PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN, DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP AND
NEA/IPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/07/2014

TAGS: ECON PGOV KWBG SOCI SA

SUBJECT: GAZA VIOLENCE LEADING TO CANCELLATION OF JEDDAH
ECONOMIC FORUM

Classified By: Martin Quinn for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Due to the conflict in Gaza, the 2009 Jeddah Economic Forum, a high profile annual event that attracts prominent visitors and wide media attention, is likely to be cancelled. Our sources tell us that the organizers say funds for the event very likely will be transferred to unspecified assistance to Palestinians in Gaza. We understand the cancellation will be announced at a press conference January 8. End summary.

¶2. (C) Several sources have privately disclosed to the US Consulate that this year's Jeddah Economic Forum (JEF), February 14-17, will most likely be cancelled. The 2009 JEF is a major, high profile international event, the 10th Economic Forum to be held in Jeddah, attracting prominent visitors and wide media attention. Previous speakers and participants have included former President Clinton, former Vice President Gore, Alan Greenspan, Queen Rania, George Soros, Richard Branson, Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi, and Muhammad Yunus.

¶3. (C) On January 6, post learned from an economist at Effat College that the Jeddah Economic Forum (JEF) has been cancelled this year. Effat College, which has played a supportive role in the past, was apparently informed of the cancellation with no reason specified. Sami Behrawi, Chairman of the JEF committee at the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI), told post that the cancellation has not yet been publicly announced, but that funds to support the Forum will be donated to assist Palestinians in Gaza.

¶4. (C) Samia Salimban, managing director of JEF at JCCI, told Poloff January 7 that the decision to cancel JEF has not yet officially been made, nor publicly disclosed. Salimban said the JEF would be cancelled, but that the "decision hasn't really been made." She said that an "emergency meeting" would be held January 8 followed by a press conference. She did not elaborate on the reason for the cancellation.

¶5. (C) Comment: While Salimban claims the decision to cancel JEF is not final, all signs point to this decision having already been taken. The final confirmation and announcement are likely to come January 8. It appears that JEF is being cancelled due to the escalating situation in Gaza and the desire within Saudi private sector organizations to send a signal of increasing solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza. While the hostilities in Gaza may have ceased by the time of the mid-February conference, the enormous size and scope of JEF would necessitate canceling the event with significant lead time. End comment.

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